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Source: *The Journal of Race Development*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Apr., 1916), pp. 357-369

Published by:

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29738166>

Accessed: 01-08-2014 01:18 UTC

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# THE JOURNAL OF RACE DEVELOPMENT

Vol. 6

APRIL, 1916

No. 4

## PSYCHOLOGICAL NOTES ON THE WAR

*By G. Stanley Hall, LL.D., President of Clark University*

To my mind there is no more splendid illustration of the spirit of fair play, of toleration, of true neutrality, in a word, of Americanism, than the spectacle, all over the country, of our schools coolly utilizing this war to teach its geography, history, economics, on a basis of facts that all admit but without bias toward or offense to any class of our citizens of whatever nationality; and also of our college youth debating everywhere with fervor and conviction the merits of both sides of this conflict, singing alternately *Die Wacht am Rhein*, *Rule Britannia*, *Heil Dir im Siegerkranz*, and the *Marseillaise*, and in the end all joining hands and voices in *The Star Spangled Banner* as a Doxology. Such spectacles are possible only in a land measurably free from the awful handicap of ancient racial animosities and national antagonisms, some of them in Europe as old as the crusades. The spirit that hears all sides with malice toward none and charity for all is not only American, but it is peculiarly academic, for that culture is a very spurious one that does not make man more tolerant toward honest views the opposite of his own. We not only permit but wish all who come to our shores from different lands to remain loyal to the spirit, traditions and ideals of their fatherland, whatever it is. We not only wish but help them to perpetuate and study its language, its literature, and to maintain its customs. We believe that such variety enriches our national life and prevents stagnation and uniformity. We insist only that they must be Americans first and not disloyal to the spirit or interests of the country in which they have elected to

live and by which their interests and their citizenship are protected. Every white citizen of this country is an immigrant or descended from immigrants, and our people are made up of representatives of every race, creed, and nation of the earth. All we require is a gentleman's agreement that although they may differ ever so widely, they must differ amicably, or at least without open strife. This is the very corner-stone of such a republic. A nation so unprecedentedly composite as ours must regard a true impartial neutrality that hears and weighs all sides as part of its manifest destiny, and this gives us in some sense a judicial position above that of the warring nations of Europe, so that the verdict of this country about the war, if it ever reaches any degree of unanimity, ought to be the verdict of history.

As one of the thousands of American teachers who have been more or less "made in Germany," I will venture to illustrate the above academic freedom by a few opinions of my own. Like so many of my class, I have felt my soul almost torn in two between a sense of loyalty to and admiration of civic and cultural Germany, from whom we have yet so much to learn, and German militarism. Not only by colonization and trade, but by the fact that Germany has set the world its highest standards in education, she was advancing her influence in peaceful ways by leaps and bounds in almost every civilized country. Her school system, from the kindergarten to the university, her marvelous illustrations of efficiency in business and municipal organization, her great thinkers and writers, were silently leavening the world; but now that she has elected to grasp the sword to enlarge her borders and increase her influence by force, she seems in a sense turning her back upon the spiritual kingdom and reversing the great choice that Jesus made between material and political rule, and that of the spirit of truth, for it must be that the pervasion of much of the rest of the world by her philosophy, culture, and science generally will be checked. Our library has collected some two thousand books and pamphlets and two hundred and fifty posters and cartoons on the present war, and we know

not how many more are to come, to which the attention of those interested is invited. It will take years and perhaps generations before we obtain a competent consensus of opinion in regard to the causes and effects of this war, and, for one, I believe that the key to understanding it is to be found in Germany, which is far too little understood by any of its enemies. The Teutons have had an almost unbroken development since the day of Tacitus. They were strong, frugal, simple in life, as valiant warriors as the world has ever seen from the Viking days of the *furor Teutonicus*. It is very significant that they never had a political revolution like that of France or our own, so that the feudal spirit and autocracy have persisted unbroken. They were not converted till the thirteenth century, and in a few generations thereafter Luther began to throw off the yoke of the Church so that Christianity has never effaced the indigenous culture, as it has done among the Latin races. Their language has isolated them, and there has been and still is a strange ignorance of both the best and the worst things in Germany by her enemies, especially by the English. When for the first time Germany felt a foreign heel upon her neck, in the days of Napoleon, Fichte began the work of giving Germany a new soul by his famous addresses in which he said: "We have little left but strong bodies, an indigenous language of our own, not composed of the debris of other tongues, an independence that has achieved the Reformation. Although our history is more marked by strife than unity, we have an inflexible will and there is only one possibility, which should be our destiny, and that is to recreate ourselves by education." So the military, financial, and educational system was radically reconstructed, and Germany began the regeneration which surprised the world in 1870. No other country in Europe, also, has succeeded in uniting the old landed aristocracy with its strong conservative and military spirit and the new rich, and to these the professors and the intellectuals generally have been added since 1870, so that all these support the Crown. Society was never so stratified into many

classes, each domineering over that below and a little inclined to servility toward that above, these classes being practically all measured in army rank as by a yardstick. Hegel made the State the supreme embodiment of the absolute reason, and the theological Richard Rothe declared that it should take the place of the Church and be the object of the same reverence and devotion that had hitherto been paid to it. There is therefore great centralization of power. The Prussian Diet, essentially the creature of the Kaiser, controls about 65 per cent of the population of the empire, and the *Bundesrat*, which represents the seventeen states that compose the empire can alone declare war. The keynote of Prussianized Germany is, discipline, organization, system, method. Everything must be done in the sharpest focus of consciousness. Attention must revise and improve upon everything in the social, financial, educational system. The school is primarily a creator of loyal German subjects, and in the last data available to me illiteracy had been reduced to sixteen hundredths of one per cent. Bergson comments upon this by dubbing Germany a machine, which in his philosophy means a soulless and lifeless, made thing or a Frankenstein, and says that new Germany is without a soul.

But if she has lately been turning her back upon the old German spirit and been remaking herself, hardly less radically than Japan has done, so that instead of being a land of dreamers she is now a land in which efficiency celebrates its highest triumphs, she has one psychic element, the extraordinary development of which I do not believe is realized, and that is will power. Kant made will the very apex of the human soul. According to his pragmatism, reason can never prove or disprove even such things as God, soul, freedom, or immortality. Nevertheless, they are truer than anything else because as postulates they work best. Man attains his highest end by acting as if they were true.<sup>1</sup> Duty Kant made the sublimest word in the whole vocabulary. It must be done in the face of every natural inclina-

<sup>1</sup>Vaihinger's *Philosophie des Als Ob*.

tion, in order to be pure, so that the moral rigorism of the categorial imperative filtered down through Schiller and many others into the folkconsciousness as a potent influence for culture, both expressing and moulding the national consciousness. Fichte, too, fired the German soul with the idea of duty, while Schopenhauer even identified will with the force and energy of the natural world, and their idealistic successors might almost have said instead of, with Louis XIV, "The state it is I," "The universe it is I, for its energy has its supreme expression in my will." Thus the German philosophy was focussing down toward the point which is well expressed in the cry of the German soldiers, "*Immer darauf und durch.*" But this focalization on will went much further in Nietzsche. He interpreted Darwinism and the survival of the fittest in the most literal and practical way. As in nature the best have survived and the worst have perished, and as evolution is going on without end, we must regard man as he is today as simply a link between the ape from which he descended and the superman that is to be. Man is a bridge. Perhaps he will be sometime a missing link. Therefore our effort must focus upon the highest possible development of the best and highest men. It is vicious to serve the meanest, the humblest. All effort must be focused on the *elite*, so that we shall in the end develop a species as much superior to modern man as he is to the troglodytes. Since Christ commended the poor and the weak he was the great enemy of the real interests of man and made for degeneration. What is needed is to develop the higher individualities to their very uttermost. Strength, energy, ruthlessness, are typical of the great man. This hypertrophied egoism made a new appeal to the ambitions of youth with its horror of inferiority of *Minderwertigkeit*, and its instinctive excelsior striving to the summits. Hence in the wake of Nietzsche we have a flood of literature developing superhumanity in different walks of life, and dramas and novels galore are inspired by this gospel. One writer declares that the supermen in the world are related to the vulgar masses or to the average man,

whose verdict we here regard as the voice of God, as Prospero was to Caliban. Unfortunately, the type of men oftenest selected as illustrating superhumanity are men like Napoleon, Borgia, Stendhal, and perhaps Goethe and Faust. Many of the literary and dramatic supermen are almost monsters of egoism, ruthlessness, and perhaps self-indulgence.<sup>2</sup> I think we might say that for many German authors there are two opposite ideals: first, one one hand, that of Jesus, often almost parodied, as in Hauptmann's *The Fool in Christ*, who seems to me meant to represent a kind of generic, totemized man, who embodies many racial traits but has evolved no or a contemptible individuality; and on the other, the ideal of an almost demonic being who lets himself go with abandon, and has, gets, and makes of himself the very most possible, regardless of others. It is impossible to estimate the influence of this movement, which seems to have gone over from philosophy to literature.

Along with this movement, a few other significant books might be mentioned, beginning with Gobineau's *Die Ungleichheit der Menschenrassen*. The author was a Frenchman who, as Bergson says, has always been almost unknown in France; a man of wealth, who traveled widely. His main thesis is that the Aryan race is vastly superior to all others, as much above other white races as the latter in general are above the blacks, that it should be given special privileges and made responsible for the rest of the world. As he was unrecognized, he died in proud seclusion, as a critic suggests, worshiping himself in a kind of ingrowing religion. After his death his work, however, was translated into German by a devoted disciple, Schemann, and made a veritable cult. It was this trend that Houston Chamberlain's book developed still further, urging that the Renaissance, which began in Northern Italy, was mainly inspired

<sup>2</sup>See Wilbrandt's *The New Humanity or Easter Island*, the chief character of which, Dr. Adler, is Nietzsche; Hoffmann's *Der eiserne Rittmeister*, Widmann's *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*; and one hesitates to mention Wedekind's trilogy on the superwoman, Lulu, who allows herself everything and storms her way through life desiring to have every possible experience.



by those who were real Teutons, and that the Catholic Church, which represented the Latin races, by its persecutions crushed out the movement. The best things in Spain in the sixteenth century and before were Teutonic, and the old Romans must have had in their blood Teutonic ancestors because true Teutons combine the intellect of the ancient Greeks, the organizing power of the Romans, and the persistency of the Jews. He admits that this fusion cannot yet be proven to be one of blood, but intimates that this will eventually come. For him all history so far is prolegomena. True history will begin when Germany realizes her superiority as she does not now. J. S. Reimers and even the anthropologist Ludwig Wolkmann go further yet in insisting that most of the great men in other nations were really Teutons.

A very significant paragraph from Mommsen, written in 1858, has lately been quoted by Charles Francis Adams to the effect that as Germany is superior to other races, she has responsibility for the higher development of other countries, and must do more than apply a merely negative Monroe Doctrine to them. Concentrating the good traits of so many nations in herself, she must give their benefits by force, if necessary, to others.

The official head of this great race, which is also a nation, with all these new strong aspirations, prospects, achievements,—the Kaiser, who has been so much discussed of late, may and may not have said all the things ascribed to him, but we should not forget that he is not only probably the ablest man in Europe but has by far the most exalted place, and has wielded the greatest influence. Perhaps he did compare himself to Joshua, desiring to lead his people out into a larger promised land; perhaps he did say that there was only one will in Germany and that was his. He is really not very responsible to either people or parliament, and he is a kind of human deity for his people. It is hard for us to understand the normal state of mind of an able man in his position. It is inevitable that he should believe in his destiny and perhaps it is necessary for him to be no



less violently antagonistic to the social democrats, who seem to be his *bête noire*. Perhaps he did tell the Potsdam recruits in 1905, that they might be called upon to shoot even their parents or brothers, referring to the social democrats, that they were the only foe he knew, etc. But it seems to me our function as neutrals is to try to understand the attitude of such a man in such a position before we pronounce him insane or the mad dog of Europe, etc. We really have a great task before us to comprehend a type of race and nationality which is so different from our own, and which can so readily be made to seem both outrageous and absurd.

There are many psychological aspects of this war that are interesting, whatever our point of view, and one pertains to the policy of frightfulness. Clausewitz's three volumes long ago advocated what he called absolute war, and his successor, Hartmann, both heads of the great military training-school, believed that military necessity justified everything, long before Bernhardi advocated a Machiavellian diplomacy. War, these men tell us, must not be limited by humanity. Every passion is and should be let loose. There is no such thing possible as civilized warfare. Military necessity can brook no opposing right or duty, and may justify every means. It can see no difference between public and private property. Brutality, even if carried to the very uttermost, may be on the whole the best policy by making war so terrible that their enemies will supremely shun it. Nothing that can help the enemy, even the civic population, should be left behind by an advancing army. One general declares that the army snaps its fingers at all critics and defies all restraints when war is on. It cannot be limited by humanity. I think there can be little doubt that Germany's conception of war differs from that of France and England, but how shall we reconcile her terrorization in Belgium with her regulations as to what must be done if German territory is invaded, in which case even the *Land-sturm*, including the old men, must be ruthless; they must wear no uniform and everybody able must do everything to kill the enemy, by whatever means. One German general

is reported to have said: "We are not barbarians yet," intimating that if the tide of war went against them, they might become so.

As to the religious effects of the war, the literature we have here seems to indicate that as war tends to bring a reversion in other respects, it is bringing more or less in all the countries involved a reversion toward the religion of youth or childhood. Baumann, a German professor, tells us that there is a great trend among the educated soldiers from Nietzsche to the New Testament, and perhaps quite as much to the Old; and Kähler says that the army feels it has four fronts, three toward the enemy and one toward heaven. Another writer describes Jesus as standing before the door of the heart of the German people as he did before the tomb of Lazarus, about to awaken it. We are told of the eagerness of soldiers for simple religious services and their consumption of religious tracts and books. In France there has also undoubtedly been a movement in the same direction, to instance only Psichari's *Le voyage du centurion*, which seems to have had immense vogue not only among soldiers but among civilians. France, of course, since the end of the Concordat, has been becoming more indifferent to religion; and the state, and especially the educational department, had made prodigious efforts to substitute the worship of France itself for loyalty to the Church, somewhat as Japan had done; for as there is little Protestantism or few half-way stations along the grammar of assent, the problem here is peculiar. The centurion of the New Testament was a military man having soldiers under him, who believed Jesus could heal his servant at a distance. This he did with evident great surprise and hearty commendation that a soldier and a Gentile should have such faith. So Psichari's assumption is that no man can be a soldier without being a Christian and *vice versa*, because the Christian must be ready to lay down his life for something dearer than it. As his hero, who is himself, leaves Paris, he feels the artificiality of civilization there, and as he advances through successive degradations into Mauretania, he finds

himself as never before, because he has found something larger than self, namely the love and service of Christ, which he identifies as the love and service of man. The final moral is that just as the hero was really converted in his campaign against the disciples of Mahomet, so French soldiers are being slowly converted to a larger, higher life in their advance against the great anti-Christ devotees of Thor, the Germans. This is the work that has made its appeal.

Very interesting to the psychologist, too, are the striking illustrations of credulity, as instance the angels at Mons, who were said by so many to have actually appeared and turned the Germans eastward when they had their enemy in their power, stories which the Psychical Research Society has rather elaborately studied and which Machen has embodied in *The Bowmen*; the false story of the Russian bells, of which *L'Illustration* printed a full account, that scores if not hundreds of them, to which the Russians attach an almost superstitious reverence, were taken from the churches overrun by the Germans and deposited in the public square of Moscow, the credulity with regard to the Russian army going from Vladivostok through England to Flanders; the persistent myth of a yellow French auto carrying a prodigious sum of money secretly and by night through Germany to Russia, which caused watches to be set in many cities and caused the deaths of a number of men; the rumor that the Crown Prince had committed suicide; that the Kaiser was dying; that a great earthquake had overthrown the lions in Trafalgar Square in London; the Wolfe Agency's report that King George had been captured; that England had sought to buy with numberless donkey-loads of gold the allegiance of the Sultan; the stories of spies, fliers, of wounded soldiers who lived supernaturally with their limbs and in one case the head shot away.

Lahy has given a very interesting story of life in the cantonments or training camps, and how, despite the hardships, the old life seems to be more or less forgotten and left behind; how men are absorbed in the present and their

sphere of thought limited; their amusements, etc. When they change to the trenches there is still more narrowing of psychic life, to almost the level of sensuous response to the here and now, with the prodigious din, the constant danger, the very difficult conditions of life; and finally the third stage in the charge itself, where the instinct to kill is prompted solely by the impulse of self-preservation, which excludes everything else from consciousness, so that if soldiers are taken right from the charge they almost forget that they have home, family, and all the other relations of their life, and gradually emerge into their normal consciousness almost as from a dream. So, too, the accounts of July and Kurt Dix of the excitement when the declaration of war was made, of the senseless runs on banks and on markets, that sometimes had to be closed; the tendency of all citizens to get acquainted on the street, obliterating all class distinctions; the trend to bunch in the open as if the herding instinct reasserted itself; the flocking in from the country on the first of August of those who for every reason should have stayed, which crowded the trains, which were soon after crowded again by citizens fleeing to the mountains as if for greater security, even in the heart of the country where there was little danger of attack, sometimes because they wished to get away from the war and hear nothing of it; the general nervous tension and anxiety as described by Weygert, often culminating in hysteria; the strange mental contagion, so characteristic of crowds and mobs. The war has been very hard on the nerves for those who have stayed at home, and quite often those thought phlegmatic before have seemed to find their ideal medium for efficient action in the excitement of the war. Several agencies have been developed for eliminating the unfit because those prone to panic are extremely dangerous, and in Germany three stations of examination for incipient nervous troubles have been developed at home, and supplementary agencies in the field. Panics of horses constitute another rather interesting chapter. So does the increase of the population of asylums. No war was ever so hard on the nerves of those who participated as

this, with its trench life, terrific explosions and so on. It is in a semi-unconscious state and purely impulsively that most of the great acts of heroism are performed, so that people become heroes without knowing it.

Freud and many others have shown how regressive war is, how it plunges man back into his basal nature, how it may perhaps in a sense be a psychological necessity occasionally, because it relieves both the tension of progress, which is hard, and the monotony and specialization of life. It immerses man in the rank primitive emotions. Some of these genetic psychologists believe that it is almost regenerative of energy, and some are pessimistic, holding that the basal instinct of mankind is to kill in the sense of Hobbes, that the murder lust is the deepest thing in man, and that such a war as this shows how very superficial and ineffective are all the restraints that culture has imposed, how the hundreds and thousands, perhaps millions, of years in which man's basal nature has been developed, are still incomparably stronger than the superficial veneer of culture of the last two or three millennia. Man longs for things racially old. He lives on an evolutionary ladder. Retrogression is a means of regeneration.

From a eugenic point of view the war is unspeakably horrible. We have various estimates as to the number of thousands of babies per month that would have been born had the twenty million men in the field stayed at home, and already we have a number of appalling statistics as to the unprecedented drop of the baby crop. Now heredity is the most ancient and precious wealth and worth, and if it is impaired in quality or quantity, disaster must follow, for only the young, the old, and the feeble are left at home to propagate the race. Of the schemes that this situation has suggested this is not the place to speak. There can be no doubt that a war involving such terrific and unprecedented strain upon the nervous system will vastly impair the quality of parenthood, not only for years but for generations, because we now know something of the very close connection between the nervous and the reproductive system. Again, if Europe

is set back, does it not follow that the fecund east, *e.g.*, China, which has already begun its regeneration, will at least greatly lessen the culture interval that separates the yellow from the white race? It seems to me that the main thing in view of all these stupendous problems in this country is for us to keep our pose and make real neutrality our religion; to insist upon a judicial attitude; to always hear the other side; to be ready not only to learn of the side to which our sympathies run counter, but to study, to appreciate this point of view. The glory of this country is that those who come here do make a *tabula rasa* of all these ghastly inherited prejudices and animosities and rancors, and that toleration here means that people must agree to differ. That we have none of these old chimneys to burn but that we can develop the philosophic temper to keep questions on which men differ wide open, is the glory of the country and gives us cause to love it more than ever.